

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and  
restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

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## Christmas at the Cosmo.

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Many rich traditions surrounding the Christmas season have been enacted at the Casa de Bandini and the Cosmopolitan Hotel over the years. A never-ending pageant of characters lived in this building at Christmas time, and each lived their version of what the holiday season should be.

For example, as the Casa de Bandini was being finished in 1829, merchant Alfred Robinson described a Christmas Eve performance of the play *Los Pastores* ("The Shepherds"), also known as *La Pastorela*, performed that year at the Presidio chapel. Amid fireworks, bonfires and church bells, the people of Old Town walked up the hill to the chapel to attend the traditional late night *misa de gallo* ("Mass of the Rooster"). Upon its completion, costumed shepherdesses, Lucifer, the clownish *Hermitano*, and the lazy drifter Bartolo, appeared in the crowd as the comedy commenced. Sent by the angel Gabriel to the manger, the shepherdesses keep getting distracted by the others, only to have the angel constantly

redirect their journey. *Pastorela* was given over and over again at individual houses and in the plaza over the next few days, and as descendent Arturo Bandini noted, food and gifts were given to the performers and to the crowd.

The most famous *Pastorela* at the Casa de Bandini itself took place Christmas night in 1838, as reported by historian Hubert Howe Bancroft. Because Juan Bandini was in a rebellion against Governor Alvarado, his troops surrounded the house while the party was going on. Two Carrillos, two Picos and an Ortega family member were taken as prisoners. Bandini's brother-in-law Jose Antonio Estudillo hid in a loft above his house next door, Bandini himself not being at home. Later to be the last governor of Mexican California, Pio Pico remembered his performance that night as Lucifer.

As for the Yankees, and other sailors, merchants, trappers, etc. of other ethnicities who came to California before the Gold Rush, there must have been many forms of Christmas (and Hanukkah) celebrated. Protestant and Central European customs must have appeared permanently as foreigners married into the local families. Historian Richard Amero noted that in 1868, a year before Seeley began the Cosmopolitan Hotel remodel, the U.S. Government Barracks down in New Town had a Christmas tree.

Whether the Cosmopolitan

Hotel had a Christmas tree for guests or not, many a celebration with fireworks and gunfire must have taken place. Stage passengers, disembarking in a strange place over the holidays, must have been welcomed into the hotel reception area with warm food, and the manager's cheer.



And regarding the ghosts of Christmas past, an archaeologist especially can appreciate the Gongora quatrain that Amero notes was sung after each *Pastorela* was completed:

Aprened flores de mi  
lo que va de ayer a hoy  
que ayer maravilla fui  
y hoy sombra de mi no soy

From me flowers learn  
How yesterday differs from today  
Yesterday I was a marvel  
But today I am not even a shadow

